

Framing a phenomenological interview: what, why and how

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Abstract Research in phenomenology has benefitted from using exceptional cases from pathology and expertise. But exactly *how* are we to generate and apply knowledge from such cases to the phenomenological domain? As researchers of cerebral palsy and musical absorption, we together answer the *how* question by pointing to the resource of the qualitative interview. Using the qualitative interview is a direct response to Varela's call for better pragmatics in the methodology of phenomenology and cognitive science and Gallagher's suggestion for phenomenology to develop its methodology and outsource its tasks. We agree with their proposals, but want to develop them further by discussing and proposing a general framework that can integrate research paradigms of the well-established disciplines of phenomenological philosophy and qualitative science. We give this the working title, a "*phenomenological interview*". First we describe the *what* of the interview, that is the nature of the interview in which one encounters another subject and generates knowledge of a given experience together with this other subject. In the second part, we qualify *why* it is worthwhile making the time-consuming effort to engage in a phenomenological interview. In the third and fourth parts, we in general terms discuss *how* to conduct the interview and the subsequent phenomenological analysis, by discussing the pragmatics of Vermeresch's and Petitmengin's "Explication Interview".

Keywords Phenomenology · Qualitative interview · Co-generated knowledge · Reciprocal interaction · Factual (Eidetic) variation · Explication interview

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1 Introduction

Research in phenomenology has benefitted from using exceptional cases from pathology and expertise. But exactly how are we to generate and apply knowledge from such cases to the phenomenological domain? For example, an investigation into the condition of Cerebral Palsy (CP) might expose challenges to our normal assumptions about what it means to have a sense of control over one's body. However, if you want to understand the lived experience of someone with CP, how would you do that? Furthermore, as seen from the McDowell-Dreyfus debate (see Schear 2013), examples from bodily expertise can be used in parallel with pathology. Such an examination might reveal something fundamental about our ability to reflect and act at the same time. Again, the same question applies: How would you go about examining the experiential life of for instance an expert musician to characterize the phenomenological structures underlying musical absorption?¹

As researchers of cerebral palsy and musical absorption, we together answer the *how* question by pointing to the resource of the qualitative interview. We do so because, 1) our cases are exceptional cases of experience to which we do not have first person access and 2) there is little, or no, literature to be found in the phenomenological tradition on these cases of experience. Using the qualitative interview is a direct response to Varela's call for better pragmatics in the methodology of phenomenology and cognitive science (Varela 1996) and Gallagher's suggestion for phenomenology to develop its methodology and outsource its tasks (Gallagher 2012). We agree with their proposals, but want to develop them further. Instead of outsourcing the task, we take full ownership of the entire process by engaging in the interview ourselves.

Many attempts have been made to construct a methodology that combines qualitative research with phenomenology (Georgi, Smith & Osborn or Van Manen). Gallagher (2012, 306) has critiqued these for not being well integrated with phenomenological philosophy. In this paper, however, rather than debating with these approaches, or developing a new method, we discuss how to conceive of a framework that integrates the qualitative interview with phenomenological philosophy. We will simply call this framework a "phenomenological interview". More specifically, we construe this framework in such a way that the interview is informed by certain phenomenological commitments and in turn informs a phenomenological investigation.

We unpack the phenomenological interview in the following way: in the first part we describe the *what* of the interview, that is the nature of the interview in which one encounters another subject and generates knowledge of a given experience together with this other subject. The interview and the phenomenological analysis are framed as a two tier process. In the second part, we qualify *why* it is worthwhile making the time-consuming effort to engage in the phenomenological interview. In the third and fourth parts, we in general terms discuss *how* to conduct the interview and the subsequent phenomenological analysis, by discussing the pragmatics of Vermersch's and Petitmengin's "Explication Interview". Here we also provide two cases from our own research in cerebral palsy and expert musicianship to illustrate how our approach differs from that of the explication interview.

¹ The study of musical absorption is related to expertise as it is usually musical experts who most consistently experience such absorption.

2 What is a phenomenological interview?

To understand what we mean by a phenomenological interview, it is useful to break down the question and first understand the nature of an interview as such. The sociologists Hammersley and Atkinson point to one distinctive feature of the interview in the context of social research:

“It is a distinctive feature of social research that the ‘objects’ studied are in fact ‘subjects’, in the sense that they have consciousness and agency. Moreover, unlike physical objects or animals, they produce accounts of themselves and their worlds.” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 97)

In an interview, one studies another subject, which means that two autonomous subjects, capable of producing accounts of themselves and their worlds, interact together in an ever-developing conversation. In order to generate the knowledge aimed for in the interview, the interviewer should in this study assume a second-person perspective. This means taking up an empathic position whereby that experience and understanding of interviewer and interviewee resonate (Varela and Shear 1999, 10). According to Zahavi, the prime point of a second-person perspective is that of “reciprocity”:

“Perhaps the most unique feature of the second-person perspective isn’t the action part, isn’t the fact that one is aware of others’ mental states as a result of engaging and interacting with them, but is rather the issue of reciprocity (De Bruin et al. 2012; Fuchs 2013). On such an account, the second-person perspective involves a reciprocal relation between you and me, where the unique feature of relating to you as you is that you also have a second-person perspective on me, that is, you take me as your you. To that extent, there cannot be a single you: there always has to be at least two. In short, to adopt the second-person perspective is to engage in a subject-subject (you-me) relation where I am aware of the other and, at the same time, implicitly aware of myself in the accusative, as attended to or addressed by the other (Husserl 1973: 211).” (Zahavi 2015, 12)

In the interview setting, “reciprocity” means that the interviewee is encountered as an autonomous “you” and that the interviewer is also encountered as a “you”, such that these two “you”s develop each other’s understanding and perspectives.² Because as an interviewer you enter the interview with specific aims, the encounter comes to be structured in specific ways. You could aim to confirm or reject certain theories about the experience of CP or musical absorption with the help of the interview. You can, however, also engage in a more open interview in which you are not out to confirm already held theories. In either case, you do not come to the interview as neutral. You have some idea about what you want to know, what the interviewee might say, and hence actively participate in the knowledge generation process.

² For a more detailed account of what we mean by encountering, see Legrand 2013a, 33–4; 2013b.

What are the dynamics for co-generated knowledge in the encounter of the interview? Varela and Shear state that the:

“position here is not that of a neutral anthropologist; it is rather one of a coach or a midwife. His/her trade is grounded on a sensitivity to the subtle indices of his interlocutor’s phrasing, bodily language and expressiveness, seeking for indices (more or less explicit) which are inroads into the common experiential ground.... Such encounters would not be possible without the mediator being steeped in the domain of experiences under examination, as nothing can replace that first-hand knowledge.” (Varela and Shear 1999, 10)

This necessary first-hand knowledge of the interviewee is first and foremost expressed in the exchange of a lot of discursive knowledge. At the same time, however, a lot of tacit knowledge is generated. Tacit knowledge, in this context, pertains to the way discursive knowledge is communicated. Knowing whether a certain statement is communicated with great conviction or with hesitation naturally changes one’s interpretation of that statement. This kind of knowledge is usually found in one’s body language, facial expression and tone of voice.³ Further, in the encounter, the knowledge generation process is interactive. Interaction could be understood in a more static manner, by which it would merely refer to a simple kind of communication in which knowledge is exchanged for example in the form of a questionnaire. As already mentioned, however, what we mean by interaction⁴ is, a reciprocity that is much more constitutive of the knowledge generation process. The interviewer asks a question and gets an answer that leads him to modify his next question. Thus, both subjects contribute to the knowledge generation process through complex dynamics, which are driven by reciprocal interaction. This kind of interaction strongly affects both the discursive and the tacit knowledge generation process.

Since the encounter does not play out in theoretically neutral space, it is important to be aware of one’s role in the co-generation of knowledge and take responsibility for it by being able to account for one’s theoretical inclination, methodology and pragmatics. In our case, these commitments derive from the philosophical tradition of phenomenology.

2.1 Phenomenological commitments: a structural ambition

Although phenomenology is not an entirely homogeneous tradition, in this context of the interview, we take it to conform to some general commitments. The first of these is the classical dictum to go “to the things themselves”, meaning that we take experience seriously, beginning, for example, with the first-person perspective of the person with CP or the musician. We try to dispense with pre-established theories, explanations and beliefs about CP or expert musicianship, letting the descriptions themselves come to the

³ The constitutive role of body language, facial expression and emotional expression in consciousness has a long tradition in phenomenology, especially in Scheler. For a more modern treatment see Krueger 2012.

⁴ “Interaction” in this context should not be identified with the philosophical position of “interactionism” as coined by De Jaegher and Di Paolo (2007). For a good discussion of interactionism and the notion of “engagement” see Satne and Roepstorff 2015.

fore. However, we are not interested merely in the experiences described by our interviewee:

“Phenomenology has as its goal, not a description of idiosyncratic experience—‘here and now, this is just what I experience’—rather, it attempts to capture the invariant structures of experience. In this sense, it is more like science than like psychotherapy. Psychotherapy is focused on the subject as a particular person and may appeal to introspection in its concern about the way and the why of the person’s experience of the world, here and now.... In this sense, phenomenology is not interested in qualia in the sense of purely individual data that are incorrigible, ineffable, and incomparable. Phenomenology is not interested in psychological processes (in contrast to behavioural processes or physical processes). Phenomenology is interested in the very possibility and structure of phenomenality; it seeks to explore its essential structures and conditions of possibility. Phenomenology aims to disclose structures that are intersubjectively accessible, and its analyses are consequently open for corrections and control by any (phenomenologically attuned) subject.” (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 28)

Gallagher and Zahavi’s conclusion is important in that it separates the practice of phenomenology from that of introspection (see also Varela 1996, 338–9; Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 21–3). In accordance with this distinction, we do not believe that the criticism of introspection applies to the phenomenological interview. This is partly so because we are not just interested in the “here and now”. Rather, we intend for our interview to disclose invariant phenomenological structures, such as the sense of control over one’s body in the case of CP or the relation between coping and reflection in the case of expert musicianship. Hence, as our second commitment, we hold that subjectivity has structures that are irreducible and invariant. This also entails that we conceive of subjectivity, the “you” in the interview, as possessing a transcendental and ubiquitous dimension. The “you” can never be reduced to a kind of object, and his experience always transcends the here and now, pointing to “invariant experiential structures that are intersubjectively accessible” (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 28).

To understand how these commitments play into the knowledge generation process, we should specify that the phenomenological interview consists of two intricately linked tiers. The first is the interview itself as the second person perspective described above, while the second is a phenomenological analysis of the first tier. In the first tier, we generate descriptions of experiential content and gain intimate first-hand knowledge of the interviewee’s lived experience. In the second tier, relying on the phenomenological method (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, chap. 2), we analyze these descriptions, in such a way that they might be generalized to say something about experiential structures and hence subjectivity as such.

We need these two tiers because we have direct experiential access neither to the interviewee’s first person-perspective, nor to the invariant structural dimensions of his experience. One might think that the interviewee possesses the knowledge of the experience we are out to disclose because it is his experience we want to understand. But, since we are after understanding both the first-person experiences and their invariant structures—the latter not voiced in the interview—this is not so. Rather, the

interview gives us the possibility to investigate and understand those structures. The function of the second tier is to actualize this possibility.

Although methodologically distinguishable, the two tiers feed into one another and are in epistemic continuity. Tier one feeds tier two by providing the discursive as well as the first-hand embodied and interactive content of the analysis. Inversely, tier two feeds into tier one, especially if one conducts several interviews, by providing the general phenomenological framework for the questions in the encounter. In other words, one's theoretical framework influences the interpretation of the descriptions, but it is also the case that the descriptions sometimes put one's theoretical framework under pressure. The analysis is therefore a dialectical process in which one's view of the meaning of the descriptions changes and in which the analysis develops until one has reached a certain level of consistency whereby one can understand all (or most of) the descriptions in the light of the conceptual framework achieved.

2.2 Descriptions and experience: a question of validity

How can we know that this analysis actually is an analysis of the experience of for example CP or musical absorption? First of all, we need to understand the relation between the interviewee's experience and his description of it. We must again remind ourselves that the interview constitutes a second person perspective in which one directly encounters another subjectivity (Varela and Shear 1999). Understanding subjectivity requires methods fundamentally different from those employed in understanding objects (Varela 1996; Zahavi 2010). Understanding subjectivity as irreducible to objectivity is our third phenomenological commitment. From a certain scientific perspective, one might think that it is essential to ensure a correspondence between an experience and its description, like an object and the description of the object. One will begin with a doubt, skeptical about whether the description of the experience corresponds to the actual experience. This doubt, however, falls prey to confusion between objectivity and subjectivity. It presupposes that an experience is like any object—an apple, car or planet—but this understanding of experience will lead one to a framework in which the descriptions of experience can be final or complete, where they can be treated as static “data” subject to “reliability” or “reproducibility”.

From a phenomenological perspective, an experience is not a thing one can retroactively return to in a straightforward manner. It has no fixed diachronic stability, hidden inside the head⁵ to be dug up by memory, no Archimedean point of reference. It is embodied and enacted in the world together with other experiencing subjects. It is a perspective on the world, marked by ever fleeting contents, but a relatively stable structure. The embodied, enactive and embedded foundation of subjectivity is our fourth phenomenological commitment.

So, in the first tier, we are not testing to what extent the interviewees' descriptions are an accurate representation of their experience as it happened at time T1. Rather, the descriptions are simply a different shape or manifestation of that very same experience. As Zahavi has argued in several places, experience can take different shapes: reflecting and describing should not be seen as a falsification of originary or pre-reflective

⁵ See Krueger 2014 and Krueger and Overgaard 2012.

experience, but should be considered as an opening up of it (Zahavi 1999, 181–9; 2005, 89–96; 2011a) The descriptions we generate in the interview, through exploratively interacting to get descriptions that are as rich and nuanced as possible, are simply such a different manifestation of the experience in question. In the encounter, experience becomes an unfolding process that is constituted by loops of memory, reflection, description and questioning in the interview.

The epistemological status of the experience reflected upon and described in the interview is subject to the so-called hermeneutical objection, as acknowledged by Varela and Shear (1999, 13). It is important to admit, as they do, that this objection and problem exist, and that the knowledge we obtain is fallible. But then again, such fallibility applies to all methods that rely on reflection, phenomenology included, as well as to science as such. We believe that our proposal fares no worse than these. As Varela and Shear conclude:

“Indeed no methodological approach to experience is neutral, it inevitably introduces an interpretative framework into its gathering of phenomenal data. To the extent that this is so, the hermeneutical dimension of the process is inescapable: every examination is an interpretation, and all interpretation reveals and hides away at the same time. But it does not follow from this that a disciplined approach to experience creates nothing but artifacts, or a ‘deformed’ version of the way experience ‘really’ is.” (Varela and Shear 1999, 14)

In order to deal with the hermeneutical dimension, we maintain our phenomenological understanding of experience also in the second tier, which means that we do not consider the descriptions as static data, but rather conceive of experience as subject to developing interpretations. Even after finishing the second tier, one can later revisit the descriptions and produce new interpretations, which present the experience in a new or even clearer light. In other words, in the first tier, our desideratum is not some kind of true or accurate representation of experience. Rather, it is simply clear and nuanced descriptions. In the second tier, however, we operate with a different set of epistemological criteria for accessing the validity of the descriptions.

Let us introduce the term “phenomenological consistency”⁶ and present two versions to account for our notion of “validity”. Firstly, “internal phenomenological consistency” refers to the ability to make comprehensible all the descriptions found in the interview. The more descriptions that can be made comprehensible under a certain phenomenological interpretation, the deeper the internal phenomenological consistency. “External phenomenological consistency” refers to the ability of the overall account produced to work with and against already established theories of the phenomena in question.⁷ External phenomenological consistency is related to the methodological step of “intersubjective validation” (Varela and Shear 1999, 10) or

⁶ Petitmengin and Bitbol (2009, 391) write about “performative consistency”. We will return to differences and similarities with Petitmengin’s account later.

⁷ In the qualitative literature, these two kinds of consistency are known as “petit” vs. “grand” generalizations (see Ravn and Christensen 2014, 6). Thanks to Susanne Ravn for bringing this point to our attention. We chose, nevertheless, to stay with “phenomenological consistency,” because this term lends itself better to our general methodological discussion.

“intersubjective corroboration” (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 29–31). The account should be consistent with the relevant theories, but can also be in a position to challenge them. In part 4 we will discuss both internal and external phenomenological consistency in relation to our own research.

3 Why engage in a phenomenological interview?

Apart from phenomenological psychiatry, classical phenomenology has not engaged with interviews. Suggesting that phenomenological research could benefit from fundamentally expanding its methods needs a strong qualification. Further, engaging in the interview process and generating knowledge in the above mentioned fashion takes a great deal of time. Not only must it be justified that the phenomenological interview can contribute to phenomenological research, given the time it takes, it must also be shown that it is worthwhile.

To do so, let us introduce the term, “eidetic variation”. Eidetic variation is traditionally understood as a methodological tool in phenomenology: “using our imagination to strip away the unessential properties of things” (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 30). It can be understood as a genre of the classical philosophical thought experiment because they both rely on imagination. Zahavi, however, points out that imagination can successfully be supplemented by real-life deviations:

“Real-life deviations can serve the same function as thought experiments. If we are looking for phenomena that can shake our ingrained assumptions and force us to refine, revise, or even abandon our habitual way of thinking, all we have to do is to turn to psychopathology, along with neurology, developmental psychology, and ethnology; all of these disciplines present us with rich sources of challenging material.” (Zahavi 2005, 141–2)

Gallagher labels the use of “real cases” (2012, 308) or “empirical data” (Froese and Gallagher 2010, 86) for the purpose of a phenomenological variation a “factual variation” (*ibid.*)⁸ We endorse this approach, but want to take it one step further.

In interviews, imagination does not stand on its own. It is supplied by the actual variations in the descriptions directly grasped from the interview. That is to say, the invariant aspects are not necessarily directly expressed in the interview as content. Rather, the content, given through the lens of the eidetic variation, points to invariants that are structural. This variation consists in a cross-fertilization of already established phenomenological concepts and invariants found in the content. So, not only can one use an interview for factual variation but, further, one should preferably engage in the process oneself, rather than merely interpreting the results of other researchers. In the following we will refer to an example from the classical phenomenological literature that shows the pitfalls of relying on other researchers’ results. This is an *ex negativo* argument for engaging in the interview oneself.

⁸ This conception of a factual variation has an epistemic status similar to Flyvbjerg’s “case study” (2011). Briefly put, this concerns the power of the case study to add to or find flaws within an established theory.

3.1 “The Schneider problem”

An example of not engaging in the encounter for the purpose of factual variation is pointed out by Rasmus Jensen (2009). It concerns Merleau-Ponty’s reading of the researchers Gelb and Goldstein’s famous case of the 24 year-old mineworker Johann Schneider, who was wounded by grenade-splinters in the back of his head during World War I (Merleau-Ponty 2002). In one instance, Merleau-Ponty uses a quotation from Goldstein thinking that it describes Schneider’s pathology. However, the first-person description in question doesn’t come from Schneider, but is Goldstein’s own description and interpretation of how normal people experience the routine actions of everyday life. Goldstein is trying to argue that when it comes to the movements of our everyday life there is no distinguishable difference between Schneider and a normal person (Goldstein 1923, 175. See Jensen 2009, 382). In other words, Merleau-Ponty takes Goldstein’s first-person description of normality as Schneider’s first-person description of pathology. This leads to an inconsistency in Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the Schneider case, as several scholars have emphasized (Dreyfus 2007c, 63–4, 69; Jensen 2009, 385–97).

In this respect, neuroscientist J. Cole has criticized the use of pathological cases among phenomenologists, since they use the cases as part of their arguments, even though there is no clear scientific understanding of the cases. He calls it the ‘Schneider’ problem, since the “case of Schneider...is quoted widely by phenomenologists, and yet I, for one, am not clear quite what psychiatric problem he had” (Cole 2008, 26). This being said, we believe that Merleau-Ponty would have gained a deeper understanding of Schneider, and probably avoided the misunderstanding of Goldstein’s descriptions, if he had directly interviewed and engaged with Schneider himself.⁹ This point is also raised by Sheets-Johnstone who questions if empirical data shouldn’t always be followed up by personal observations. Shouldn’t Merleau-Ponty have interviewed Schneider at the clinic where he was treated, observed other patients at the clinic and talked to Gelb and Goldstein in person (Sheets-Johnstone 1999, 277)?

It is precisely at this point that the phenomenological interview is called for. When using other researchers’ empirical data, Merleau-Ponty, as well as Zahavi and Gallagher, are forced to treat it in the third person. This third person data is then used philosophically for the factual variation. In other words, there is an epistemological discontinuity between others’ data and one’s own interpretation. In contrast, in the phenomenological interview process, the tier one first-hand encounter and the tier two phenomenological analysis are in constant interchange, in epistemological continuity. If an ambiguity arises at the level of description, rather than approaching it as fixed or unalterable data, and beginning one’s process of interpretation, one can return to the interviewee and ask for clarification. Our knowledge remains open to being revisited and re-interpreted. Ultimately, one can never avoid making interpretations, but one’s aim in the interview is to get descriptions that are as clear, detailed and unambiguous as possible.

⁹ Tatossian makes the same objection to Merleau-Ponty’s methodology and argues that we should “engage directly with the madman” (Tatossian 2002, 12). See also Zahavi 2010.

3.2 Taking enaction, embodiment and embeddedness seriously

We have argued that the interview yields a unique source of knowledge. As mentioned, the knowledge attained through the interview is co-generated. We would now like to elaborate on this idea by establishing that the knowledge generated is unique also because it is enacted, embodied and embedded. Phenomenological orthodoxy takes one's embodiment as well as one's embeddedness to play a constitutive role in experience (Varela et al. 1991; Gallagher 2005; Gallagher and Zahavi 2008; Thompson 2010). Now, if one believes that experience is constituted at least in part by one's agency, body and socio-environmental context, it seems to follow that, if one wishes to understand a given experience as thoroughly as possible, then one ought to include a consideration of enaction, embodiment and embeddedness in one's general method. This methodological claim was part of Varela's original contribution in introducing the method of neurophenomenology and in arguing for an enacted, embodied and embedded cognitive science (Varela 1996, 346). Compared to the decontextualized and disembodied knowledge gained in reading data or transcriptions about someone else's experience, the encounter directly confronts us with these aspects of experience. The reciprocal interaction and the embodied and contextualized nature of the encounter directly feed into the generation of knowledge. As already described, we gain access to the interviewee's experience by assuming an empathetic second-person perspective and by coming to know in a first-hand manner the accompanying gestures of a certain description, as well as the way and context in which it took place.

Through the encounter, our factual variation has an advantageous epistemological foundation over that which simply relies on data produced by other researchers. We are thus in line with Gallagher when he argues that it is not enough for phenomenology to accommodate empirical data: "it must also attempt to come to terms with appropriate scientific research methods" (Froese and Gallagher 2010, 86). We believe that the phenomenological interview can be one such research method, which also answers to his critique of the promise to use phenomenology as a basis for qualitative research (Gallagher 2012, 306).

3.3 Practical applications

In this article, we present the phenomenological interview as a general framework. In doing so, we hope to engage, on the one hand, researchers outside of, but with an interest in, the discipline of phenomenology and, on the other hand, phenomenologists interested in expanding their methodological framework. This aim, as demonstrated above, would not only benefit the theoretical work done within phenomenology and fields engaging with phenomenology, but we also believe it would benefit the practical applications of phenomenology. Many fields outside phenomenology use phenomenological methods, concepts and theories for practical purposes, such as in the practice of expertise, athletics and meditation, in the development of clinical practices or in the education of for example nurses, doctors, psychologists and architects. However, reiterating Gallagher, we have claimed that these practices are not well integrated with phenomenology. Therefore, the third answer to the *why* question is that not only philosophers, but also people from all the above-mentioned fields, would hopefully be able to improve their practices with some of the thinking we put forth.

In this context, the qualitative interview is of great use, since many of the abovementioned groups already have extensive knowledge of the methodological and practical aspects of interviews. A task of this paper has been to set up a general framework in which practitioners with a phenomenological interest can work with a phenomenological perspective. We are not going to present an overall manual for how to do so, since, depending on one's field and practice, one's intended output, and the person one is interviewing, it should be adjusted to serve specific purposes.

There are already good examples of how to combine the resources of both phenomenology and the qualitative interview. For example, in the clinical work on schizophrenia, the EASE (Examination of Anomalous Self-Experience) framework shows how, through the use of interviews, the field of psychopathology and psychiatry benefits from phenomenology and vice versa (Parnas et al. 2005). The work done by Legrand and Ravn on the expertise of dancers also shows how both ethnographical research and phenomenology can be combined through the use of qualitative interviews (Legrand and Ravn 2009. See also Ravn and Hansen 2013; Ravn forthcoming). The most well-known example is the use of interviews within the so-called method of neurophenomenology to help combine neuroscience and phenomenology (Varela 1996; Lutz et al. 2002; Lutz 2002; Lutz and Thompson 2003; Reinerman-Jones et al. 2013; Bockelman et al. 2013; Gallagher et al. 2014; Colombetti 2014, chap 6.). This combination can have therapeutic effects as seen especially in the work of Petitmengin on epileptic seizures (Le Van Quyen and Petitmengin 2002; Petitmengin et al. 2007). In neurophenomenology, a specific kind of interview is typically used, namely the Explication Interview (EI) as developed by Vermersch and Petitmengin.¹⁰ We will in the two final parts of the paper discuss EI in order to draw out the pragmatics of our general framework of a phenomenological interview.

4 How to conduct a phenomenological interview: tier one

Phenomenology has been criticized on various fronts for not having developed appropriate methods that incorporate pragmatics from the second-person perspective. Varela's development of neurophenomenology (1996) and Vermersch's development of the "Explication Interview" (EI) (1994) are both responses to such a critique. Vermersch develops his interview method while attempting to reinterpret and improve the use of introspection (Vermersch 1999). This might at first seem to be in contrast to the phenomenological tradition, which historically has criticized introspective psychology and sought to develop a more rigorous method for describing experience. Vermersch, however, turned to the tradition of introspection, because it has a more developed pragmatic approach than classical phenomenology, which has not concerned itself much with practice (Ibid, 17).

In this paper, as mentioned, we cannot and do not wish to provide a manual for a phenomenological interview. However, we certainly take Varela and Vermersch's above criticism very seriously and therefore wish to address exactly how the pragmatics of the interview functions in our general phenomenological framework. To this end, in the following, we present two sections that further develop the two tiers of our framework.

¹⁰ In this paper, we use the claims of Vermersch and Petitmengin interchangeably.

In relation to the first tier, it is crucial to stress that one primarily learns to conduct an interview by doing it. In other words, as interviewing is an embodied skill to be acquired, one cannot provide an exhaustive manual of its pragmatics. Nevertheless, one can of course learn a lot of specific interview skills by reading up on qualitative science methodology, which provides good rules of thumb and lots of examples of best practice (e.g. Brinkmann and Kvale 2014; Allen-Collinson 2009; Flyvbjerg 2011). However, as mentioned, the focus of the phenomenological interview is not only to understand the experience of the interviewee, but more importantly to understand the invariant phenomenological structures of this experience. In this respect, and as phenomenologists, our questions have a different orientation from those of qualitative researchers, anthropologists, ethnographers, sociologists and psychologists.

The method that comes closest to the phenomenological interview is EI. Over the following pages, we will introduce and discuss the pragmatics of EI and provide examples from our own research into CP and musical absorption. We do so because what we share with EI, we believe to be of the essence of the pragmatics at play in a general framework of a phenomenological interview. Despite a shared essence, however, due to some theoretical differences, as will become apparent, we put a different weight on the second tier of phenomenological analysis. Further, EI has more elaborate pragmatics for developing descriptions in the first tier. What we will bring out in the following is how different theoretical commitments give rise to differing pragmatics.

4.1 The explicitation interview

We have earlier presented the general hermeneutical difficulty pertaining to the relations between experience, reflection and expression. In addition to this come more specific difficulties such as giving descriptions that are adequately detailed rather than general, stabilizing one's attention to one's experience and then rendering that experience into words. Petitmengin (2006) has done excellent work in systematically presenting these difficulties in her EI framework. In this paper we cannot do justice to all the details of EI, and in the following present a mere overview. Further, taking our own commitment to epistemological continuity between the generation of data and its subsequent interpretation seriously, we here run the risk of misrepresenting EI as we haven't been trained in the method.¹¹

In a recent overview, Bitbol and Petitmengin take the interview process of EI to consist in leading the interviewee "to realize the following acts" (2013a, 273): Moving from descriptions or explanations of experience in general to descriptions of particular, singular lived experience. This is equivalent to moving the focus of attention from a belief about past experience to actual descriptions of it. This is done by repeatedly reenacting and thereby *evoking* (Vermersch 2012, 2) selected time slices of the targeted singular experience situated in time and space. Such attention has to be stabilized by inviting the interviewee to suspend any other concern, by reformulating the last pieces of the report given in order to constantly question the interviewee, and finally by bringing the interviewee back to the thread of descriptions if she starts judging or explaining it. The interviewer constantly leads the interviewee to turn her attention

¹¹ We have met with Petitmengin and experienced a brief tutorial. Our understanding of EI is thus formed from this encounter as well as from all the publications on EI.

from the “why” and “what” of experience to the important “how” of its givenness: “In other words, moving attention from the narrow *content* to the complete *act* of consciousness, which is tantamount to performing the phenomenological reduction” (Bitbol and Petitmengin 2013a, 273). We here start to notice the attempted *rapprochement* of the theories of introspection and phenomenology. Let us put that aside for the moment and describe in more detail the specific questioning technique.

EI takes inspiration from so-called “Ericksonian language”,¹² which, among other things, emphasizes the use of a specific kind of open question in contrast to closed questions (Vermersch 1999, 36; Petitmengin 1999, 47; 2006, 250–2). By their formulation, open questions do not already presuppose more knowledge than they aim to gather, whereas closed questions introduce biases in their formulation and already suggest possible answers to the questions, as well as concepts useful for verbalizing them. An example of a closed question could be: “when you played the concert yesterday, were you in a state of deep absorption or not?” Open questions, in the EI context, should be “directive” and guide the interviewee to focus on the concrete and singular experiences that the interviewer is interested in understanding (Petitmengin 2006, 252). This is done by reformulating the last piece of the report into a question and inviting the interviewee to check and further develop the accuracy of the reformulation.

Petitmengin presents the following example of using open “how” questions to guide the interviewee to describe an experience of concentrating:

- I am concentrating
- What do you do to concentrate?
- (...) I am listening to what is happening inside me.
- What do you do to listen? If you wanted to teach me how to do it, what would you tell me?
- (...) First, I am going to put my consciousness much further towards the back of the skull.
- What do you do to put your consciousness at the back of the skull? (...)

And when to the questions: “What do you do to ...”, “*How* do you know that ...”, the interviewee begins to answer: “I do nothing”, or “I don’t know”, the interviewer, in order to encourage the emergence into consciousness of the pre-reflective dimension, may use ‘Ericksonian’ language:

And when you do nothing, what do you do?
 And when you don’t know, what do you know?
How do you know that you don’t know?” (Petitmengin 2006, 250. Our italics)

We here see the Ericksonian language at play. The kind of questioning above employs an guided kind of bracketing, which is intended to: “encourage the emergence into consciousness of the pre-reflective dimension”. The purpose of such guided bracketing is, according to Vermersch and Petitmengin, to avoid getting caught up in

¹² Milton Erickson was an American psychotherapist specializing in hypnosis. Ericksonian language is language that is empty of content, namely language that refers to the subject’s experiences without introducing and naming the content of the experience beforehand (see Petitmengin 1999, 47).

a so-called natural, naïve and basic attitude, which would aim at understanding only the content of the conscious experiences (Petitmengin and Bitbol 2009, 384–7). This shows that EI is influenced by phenomenological methodology and that their main interest in the interview is addressing the pre-reflective dimension of experience (Vermersch 2009, 40; Petitmengin 2006, 231).

4.2 Getting to the pre-reflective

To Petitmengin, the pre-reflective is that which is “not yet conscious” (Petitmengin 2007, 55, Note 1). A strong interpretation of this statement is that pre-reflective experience is not conscious at all, but this would be a misunderstanding of the notion ‘pre-reflective’ (Zahavi 2011a, 9–10). Instead, it should be understood as that which is not yet reflectively conscious. Prior to the interview, it was not available to reflection and verbalization, but EI provides this access. Vermersch elaborates that there are different descriptive ‘layers’ of all lived experiences and that descriptions can be carried out with different degrees of ‘granularity’ (Vermersch 2009, 51). The aim of EI is to arrive at the degree of granularity where the targeted pre-reflective ‘layer’ of lived experience becomes discursively apparent. Petitmengin sees this as a ‘deepening’ of the descriptions to the required level of precision (2006, 248). The interviewer already has a meta-knowledge of the preferred level of deepening and uses open questions to “help the interviewee to stabilise his attention on this unusual level of detail, in order to become aware of pre-reflective internal operations, particularly tests, comparisons and diagnoses that are highly implicit” (Petitmengin 2006, 249, *our italics*). Getting to this level of pre-reflective knowledge is what Petitmengin calls the “reduction” (Petitmengin and Bitbol 2009, 385–6).¹³ However, we should distinguish the devices that make it possible to elicit the reduction in an interview context and the reduction itself (*ibid.*, 385). Petitmengin and Bitbol mention the devices that we have already described, namely bracketing and the use of open questions, and end up arguing that if we use these devices of reduction the interviewee will ‘come into contact with’, or in other words ‘get closer and closer to’, the pre-reflective experiences (Petitmengin and Bitbol 2009, 386–7).

When the interviewee is giving her descriptions, she should also be in a ‘speech position’ or ‘embodied utterance position’, which is indicative of whether she actually ‘comes into contact’ with the pre-reflective experience (Petitmengin 2006, 256–7; Bitbol and Petitmengin 2013a, 273). Petitmengin argues that there are objective indicators that can be used in order to identify whether the interviewee actually is in a preferred speech position. These indicators can for example be the vocabulary used to give the descriptions, the direction of the eyes when giving the descriptions, the flow of the descriptions and the bodily gestures. Thus, the EI interview method has an elaborately constructed process and specific practical devices to ensure that the interviewee directly verbalizes his pre-reflective experience.

Petitmengin and Vermersch were not finding adequate pragmatic support in classical phenomenology for using interviews in order to understand others’ experience.

¹³ This reduction is supposed to refer to the classical phenomenological reduction. We would like to see this claim elaborated, as the phenomenological reduction can be several things and is furthermore easily confused with the *epoche*, namely the bracketing of pre-suppositions that they also use (Petitmengin and Bitbol 2009, 384–5). See Luft 2012 for a clarification of this aspect of Husserlian methodology.

Therefore, they turned to the tradition of introspection, mixed with therapeutic (Ericksonian) and Buddhist inspiration (Petitmengin 2006, 232), and attempted to introduce phenomenological theory into the pragmatic context of introspection.¹⁴ We suspect that the attempted integration of at least three different theoretical frameworks (phenomenology, introspection, and Buddhist philosophy) leads to confusion. Vermersch states that, “as far as the actual practice of gathering information about one’s own experience is concerned, there are no major differences in acts between phenomenological ‘reflection’ and psycho-phenomenological introspection” (Vermersch 2009, 25). This statement is based on his view that if one suspends the transcendental aim of phenomenology then the pragmatics of phenomenology and introspection are similar, albeit carried out under different specific presuppositions. Petitmengin and Bitbol don’t seem to share this view, since they either distance themselves from using the term ‘introspection’ (Petitmengin and Bitbol 2009, 379) or redefine introspection as “expanded mindfulness” (Bitbol and Petitmengin 2013b, 183). It is difficult to see how phenomenological reflection, introspection, and expanded mindfulness can all refer to the same thing and even be combined in the same interview methodology. The term “introspection”, in particular, seems problematic.

In this respect, Zahavi writes that there are some fundamental phenomenological problems in talking about pre-reflective experiences as ‘internal’, something that you can ‘come into contact with’ or ‘get closer to’ (Zahavi 2011a, 13). As we have mentioned earlier on, an experience is not something purely internal to be dug out. Further, it does not have the kind of object-like properties that allows one to get “closer to it” or “come into contact with it”. Zahavi suggests that it would be wiser for Petitmengin and Bitbol to stick with the terminology of noticed/unnoticed, i.e. that pre-reflective experiences are something experientially unnoticed. In their reply to Zahavi, Petitmengin and Bitbol acknowledge his point (Bitbol and Petitmengin 2011, 24), and say that the pre-reflective is what becomes accessible in the interview, explained by means of the feeling the interviewee has when realizing the richness of the experiences he lived through. In more recent work, they write that critiques like Zahavi’s “target an abstract image of introspection rather than introspection *per se*” and that they want to “quickly overcome them and see if a concrete project of rebirth of introspection can meet them *in practice*” (Bitbol and Petitmengin 2013b, 175). This rebirth consists in understanding introspection as an “enlargement of the field of attention and contact with re-enacted experience,” rather than ‘looking within’” (Bitbol and Petitmengin 2013a, 269). This seems to be a reformulation of introspection that to some extent meets Zahavi’s worries. Nevertheless, one central issue remains, namely that experience is conceptualized such that one can “re-enact” it. In the context of the interview, to ensure this re-enactment, EI needs to operate with the pragmatic elements of bracketing, reduction and objective indicators to “enlarge the field of attention and contact with re-enacted experience” that gets us to the pre-reflective structure of experience. Petitmengin and Bitbol write that the open “‘content empty’ questions help the subject to become aware of the different structural—diachronic and

¹⁴ On par with other recent approaches, EI seems to be a melting pot of introspection, phenomenology, Buddhist philosophy and meditative techniques, and in some contexts even therapy, education and knowledge management (Depraz et al. 2003. See also Varela et al. 1991; Varela and Shear 1999; Thompson 2014; Colombetti 2014).

synchronic—dimensions of his experience, and to give a verbal description of them” (Bitbol and Petitmengin 2011, 385).

By contrast, we believe that our positive proposal evades much of the confusion described above. We do not subscribe to the idea that, with the correct methodological steps, experience can be re-enacted in the interview. Rather, as mentioned, in a phenomenological interview the experience is co-generated by interviewee and interviewer together. We hold this to be the primary access to experience in the interview and cannot subscribe to the idea that one can re-enact it. Therefore, the object of analysis in our case is the co-generated description of experience, and it does not make sense for us to operate with a series of strict steps to ensure its re-enactment and thus access its pre-reflective dimension. In the first tier, we ‘only’ try together to get descriptions that are as detailed and nuanced as possible. In some cases, the interviewees do notice aspects of their experiences they hadn’t noticed before, but this doesn’t mean that they are re-enacting the lived experiences we aim to understand.

On our proposal, we then see the weight shift slightly away from the first tier to interpretive analysis in the second tier. The structural aspect of experience is something that we arrive at through phenomenological analysis of the co-generated descriptions. Before going into the details of the second tier, we will now give examples of the first tier of the interview processes from CP and musical absorption.

4.3 Cerebral palsy

‘Cerebral Palsy’ (CP) is typically defined as a group of disorders in the development of postural and motor control, occurring as a result of a non-progressive lesion of the developing central nervous system (Bax et al. 2005). In 90 % of the cases, the lesion, especially in the upper motor neurons, occurs during pregnancy, and CP is the most common type of congenital disorder associated with lifelong motor impairment. The overall aim of the interview was to understand the bodily experience that persons with CP have when performing their everyday actions. The interviews focused on the most common type of CP, spastic CP, and attempted to represent the diversity of spastic CP by including 14 participants: 7 women and 7 men, all Danish citizens, from the age of 23 to 57 years old, with a diverse range in the nature and degree of severity of bodily impairment.

The interviews was semi-structured, focusing on the experiences that persons with CP have of their own bodies, and were intended to address the structures that inform one’s sense of control. The questions were in the first few pilot interviews inspired by the dominating phenomenological (hermeneutical) approach to disorder, and addressed the supposed objectification, alienation and disruption of their embodiment (Zaner 1981; Leder 1990; Toombs 1992; Svenaeus 1999; Carel 2008, 2013). However, from the very beginning of the interviews, when asked very broad questions like “Can you describe how you experience living with CP in your daily life?” or “How does CP express itself in your daily life?” all of the interviewees emphasized the problems of actually describing living with CP, since it is congenital. They were born like this and have never tried or experienced anything different. There has never been a ‘before’ or an ‘after’, which would make it easier for them to describe their experiential differences. This meant that, first of all, expressions of objectification, alienation and disruption only came up in very few descriptions and that, secondly, it was difficult

to conduct the interviews, proceed to more concrete questions, and achieve detailed, clear and useful descriptions of the interviewees bodily experiences, all of which should serve as the basis for the second tier. Many descriptions that they gave about their bodily experiences in the beginning of the interview were therefore brief and conclusive: ‘That’s just the way it is’, ‘I never notice it’, or ‘That’s just me.’ Furthermore, since the interviewees have been part of the Danish healthcare system their entire life, meeting with healthcare professionals on a weekly basis, they give in many instances medical, neuro-physiological and therapeutic explanations of their experiences, instead of their own descriptions: ‘My doctor says that the reason why I experience...’ or ‘According to my physiotherapist these experiences arise because...’

However, during the interviews and due to persisting and repetitive questioning, the descriptions became more concrete, addressing specific situations where the bodily experiences of living with CP came to the forefront, such as ‘riding a bike’, ‘walking down a staircase’, ‘tying one’s shoes’, and ‘participating in sports or other social activities with peers, family, friends and colleagues’. When addressing these concrete situations and experiences by asking open ‘how’ questions like ‘How do you experience your body when walking down a staircase?’ or ‘How would you describe the experience of riding a bike?’ the answers provided very detailed descriptions, as seen in the description given by *FN*, a 39-year-old spastic tetraplegic:

So if you are trying to get your legs moving when riding a bike there is always the experience of resistance in doing the movement, and although I think: ‘come on, increase the pace’, because I feel I can do it in my body and my head, it’s not what my legs are doing. They have their own pace, and sometimes I experience that if I try to force them, then the stiffness, the spasticity, works against me...In the end I’m totally stiff and I stop completely.

This description was then followed up by more open ‘how’ questions, e.g. ‘how do you experience being totally stiff?’ Of special interest, was the interviewees’ use of analogies between their own experiences and what they imagine or think must be ‘normal’ experiences of the situation. For example, in order to express their experience of riding a bike or walking down a staircase, they give descriptions like: ‘I imagine that my experience of my body while riding a bike is like always having weights around your ankles’ or ‘The experience is like if you had to walk with weights on your feet, but I have just never had the weights off my feet.’

In the end, all the interviewees gave very detailed descriptions of concrete experiences and situations in their daily life. Common to these descriptions were the expressions of actually having a ‘certainty’ in and ‘control’ of their bodily movements, despite their spasticity. These descriptions, as well as the expressions and concepts used in them, became the main focus of tier two.

4.4 Musical absorption

Høffding’s work aims at understanding the phenomenological character of musical absorption. Many musicians claim to occasionally experience a trancelike state of absorption while playing, an apparent self-less state seemingly marked by a complete lack of awareness. To investigate this and to understand the nature of musical

absorption in general, Høffding engaged in a series of interviews with, and observations of, the world-renowned classical string quartet, “The Danish String Quartet”.

In the first tier, Høffding prepared a number of questions to guide a semi-structured interview. He was working under a number of assumptions, a central one being that “selfless” absorption or “mindless coping” (Dreyfus 2006, 2007a, b, 2013) is an example of consciousness without a “minimal self” (Zahavi 2005, 2011b), or that there can be awareness without self-awareness, thus opposing a central tenet in the phenomenology of Husserl, Sartre, Henry, and Zahavi. The interviews were intended to enable Høffding to draw conclusions about the nature of self-awareness, and the invariant structures of musical absorption.

In the interview situation, it did not make sense to ask “do you experience losing yourself, while playing?” or “Do you often experience black-outs while performing”. These would be closed questions, eliciting a yes or a no. Rather, Høffding was looking for descriptions of concrete experiences: “When on your own, how do you practice; is there anything in particular you focus on?” Because of Høffding’s background and theoretical preferences, it was easy to evaluate what kinds of answers were interesting and which were not. In other words, alongside the interview, there was an ongoing implicit philosophical analysis of what answers could be used for phenomenological insights, how they could be categorized, how they spoke to one’s preconceptions and whether they contradicted one another. For those that seemed to be the most interesting, Høffding asked for elaborations and, in cases where they contradicted something mentioned earlier, he sometimes intervened more forcefully, as the explicit presentation of the interviewee’s statements as contradictory was likely to spur further reflection and description.

The DSQ members did not need much time before they began talking about their experiences of absorption, probably because such experiences are generally considered artistically significant, but certainly because they are existentially significant, imprinted with intensity in their memory.¹⁵ Nevertheless, most of the descriptions were brief, à la “black-out”, “meditation-like” or “in a trance”, and the musicians were acutely aware of their inability not just to give expression to the experience, but to retroactively access the experience. About 1 year subsequent to the first set of interviews, going back to the first tier in a new set of interviews, Høffding and the quartet members were able to generate longer, more precise, but also more poetic descriptions that pointed to a change in the sense of agency during the experience of deep absorption.

One of the most exciting aspects of the interview was its unpredictability. Often the most interesting descriptions emerged from a scattered comment or anecdote, perhaps even after the interview was formally concluded. One could not in advance know what questions would be the most successful. A simple and seemingly straightforward question to the cellist, “How do you actually play a phrase?” happened to be the most complex for him. It animated a description equivalent to four transcribed pages of the minutest of details on how one progresses from one note to the next, on musical authenticity and on the nature of concentration, material that altogether is of immediate value to phenomenological development.

¹⁵ Deep absorption is interestingly paradoxical when it comes to memory. On the one hand, musicians cannot remember what was going on during a deeply absorbed performance but, on the other hand, they clearly remember that they had an unusual experience and can often tell the exact time and place of its occurrence.

5 How to conduct a phenomenological interview: tier two

Having gone over the pragmatics of tier one in the two case studies, it is now time to look at the second tier, which has to do with the analysis of the experience as encountered in tier one and how to account for its validity.

5.1 Performative consistency and validity in action in EI

If experience is something one can get “closer and closer” to, then one is forced to determine criteria for whether one has achieved adequate closeness. These criteria are not to be understood in “traditional introspective studies” as pertaining to a “correspondence theory of truth” between experience and its description (Bitbol and Petitmengin 2013a, 270). Bitbol and Petitmengin stress that in EI, as in any scientific method, there should be what they call ‘performative consistency’, which “consists of an agreement among a) the theories, b) the construction of devices and the understanding of their functioning, c) the theoretical guidance of measurements, and d) the results (Pickering 1995)” (Petitmengin and Bitbol 2009, 391). They give examples of astronomy and neuroscience and argue that, even in these sciences, researchers only have access to and engage with the ‘data’ through instruments and recordings, meaning that they don’t have access to the actual astronomical events or the activity of the brain as such. It is tempting to think that, when scientists give convincing explanations, those explanations are validated through a correspondence between the theory and its external object. However, what is in fact the case, they argue, is that the explanation is validated through performative consistency. This consistency should also hold in research into experience, which means that validity “is no longer measured in terms of ‘truth’, of representative exactitude, or adequacy in relation to a pre-existing experience, but according to the manner of its genesis, the quality of contact with the experience in which the description originates, and the remoteness of its source” (Petitmengin 2006, 257–8). In other words, the validity does not in the first place concern the descriptions, but the acts of re-enacting, turning attention, stabilizing attention, etc. performed by the interviewee. Petitmengin and Bitbol call this ‘validity in action’ (2009, 400).

They justify this new concept of validity by referring to the kingpin of any scientific validation, namely reproducibility: a result must be reproducible, at least potentially, by any researcher. Here, validity should be understood in relation to the interview process, which means getting the interviewee to perform the acts that ensure validity in action. The aim is to set up an exhaustive prescriptive method for how to ‘correctly’ conduct an interview, such that other interviewers can be trained in the process that leads the interviewee to perform the acts in question. Via Ericsonian language, objective indicators and validity in action, EI has achieved a prescriptive manual-like procedure for the interview, a procedure that can be taught to others.

We acknowledge the overall idea of consistency between one’s theories, interview process, descriptions and analysis, and that other researchers should be able to be trained in working with a phenomenological interview. Nevertheless, we do not operate with a manual-like procedure for performing the interview and do not strive to reproduce the aforementioned acts that indicate a re-enacted or evoked experience because we don’t subscribe to the idea of re-enactment in the first place. Instead, we

emphasize that in the interview process one should be aware of one's phenomenological commitments, take up an empathetic, reciprocal and second-person perspective when encountering the subject, and ask specific open questions in order to get descriptions that are as detailed as possible. In this respect, one has to remember that interviewing is an embodied skill to be acquired. One cannot provide an exhaustive manual of its pragmatics.

Having no manual-like procedures, but only recourse to detailed and clear description, how do we define the point at which the descriptions are sufficiently clear to enlighten a phenomenological analysis? How do we ensure validity in our work?

Our answer is that there is no point at which the descriptions are sufficiently clear to enlighten a phenomenological analysis. In our framework, there is no such thing as a wrong or incorrect description and, therefore, it makes no sense to ensure the truth or reproducibility of a description in the interview. However, it is of course important to maintain the distinction between clear and less clear descriptions. We can take this stance is because we have a second tier where the validity of the interpretations of the descriptions comes into question. In this second tier, we rely on the traditional analytical work of phenomenology and use the descriptions from the interview as a point of departure for phenomenological analysis. We will now exemplify how we analyze the material from tier one through a phenomenological lens and how we conceive of phenomenological consistency as a development of EI's performative consistency.

5.2 Cerebral palsy

The main work of the second tier was the transcription of the interviews, the thematization of specific descriptions of, in this case, the bodily experiences of CP, and the phenomenological analysis of these experiences (see Martiny 2015; [under review](#)). The transcriptions were done by additionally focusing on the video recordings of the interviews, since several of the interviewees were difficult to understand solely based on the tape recordings, due to speech impairment. After transcribing the interviews, Martiny made use of the phenomenological method of bracketing, so as to bracket the many medical, neuro-physiological and therapeutic explanations the interviewees gave of their experiences. This wasn't done to exclude these explanations from the analysis, but to focus, as a point of departure, on the interviewees' descriptions of their bodily experiences when performing daily actions. These descriptions were structured into several experiential themes where the experience of 'bodily certainty' and of 'bodily control' became the primary focus of the analysis.

In the analysis process, Martiny used the many different descriptions of these specific experiences as a means of factual variation, which helped to point to invariant structures of the experience. These structures concern the so-called *sense of control* that is an experiential aspect of human agency, and the interpretation of the descriptions illustrated how a sense of bodily certainty and control relates to our agency. Understanding this structural dimension of the experiential life of CP meant making the descriptions that relate to the experience of bodily certainty and control comprehensible in themes, and granting the analysis of these themes an internal phenomenological consistency.

Part of the analysis process consisted in relating the descriptions and interpretations of the interviewees' experience' to phenomenological work already done on

pathological distortion of one's sense of agency, bodily certainty and control in, for example, cases of schizophrenia, serious illness, OCD, depression and anxiety disorder (e.g. Fuchs 2010; Meynen 2011a, b; Carel 2013; de Haan et al. 2013, *in press*). Martiny presented drafts of his analysis at phenomenological and cognitive science conferences as a way to engage the phenomenological community with the descriptions and interpretations garnered from his interviews with persons with CP. However, most of the time was spent discussing his analysis with neurophysiological researchers and healthcare personnel (physiotherapists, occupational therapists and psychologists) working daily with CP. These presentations and discussions led to several reinterpretations of the above descriptions and to the writing of new drafts. They also led to the inclusion and discussion of empirical data from other studies of CP in the interpretation of these descriptions. All these attempts to communicate and discuss the analysis of the interviewees' descriptions within both phenomenology and other relevant fields are an example of creating external phenomenological consistency in their interpretation.

One of the overall conclusions of the analysis, as presented in Martiny (2015), was that this case study challenges the few phenomenologically inspired studies focused on CP (Sandström 2007; Peckitt et al. 2013), as well as the dominating theoretical framework of phenomenological research regarding one's sense of agency, bodily certainty and control. It's typically not the case that persons with CP experience the objectification, alienation and disruption of their bodily experience or that they experience a diminished sense of agency or lack of control, despite undergoing spastic involuntary movements. Instead, they experience their body as something they have control over and are certain of, but the way in which they experience this comes about by exerting control.

5.3 Musical absorption

For Høffding, the second tier began with the transcription of statements from tier one and the generation of phenomenologically relevant categories. From the transcriptions, detailed descriptions were favoured and heavily opinionated statements bracketed. Non-essential material such as aspects of the interviews that strayed completely from the topic was not included in the categorized version. Through the process of selection and categorization, the entire transcription was reorganized, condensed and thus more amenable to establishing a clear overview of the large data-set. Key categories contained passages on reflection, deep absorption (or "being in the zone") and an altered sense of self, which could be used as a factual variation to the claim that reflection impedes coping (for more methodological details, see Høffding and Schiavio *forthcoming*). This work initiated a series of analyses, philosophical reflections, discussions, and the writing of several drafts. In Høffding's case, part of the interview material could efficiently be set up against Dreyfus' framework to expose a number of problems. Over 3 years of working on several drafts regarding different aspects of the phenomenology of expert musicianship, re-categorizing and re-conceptualizing material from tier one, presenting the material in numerous workshops and conferences and receiving feedback from several academics, Høffding could make a number of warranted and coherent conclusions, some presented in Høffding 2014. As mentioned, it

cannot generally be accepted that reflection obstructs coping: rather, Høffding's work revealed that the very notion of "coping" is in fact spurious with no definite referent, because all but a very few mental states experienced while performing include an aspect of coping. Also, Høffding's initial preconception of a selfless intentionality seemed to be misguided. Rather, the interviews indicate that deep absorption is marked by a profound change in the sense of agency and self-awareness, which leads to difficulty in self-ascription during deep absorption.

The idea that deep absorption, rather than a complete lack of self-awareness, is an expression of a profound change in self-awareness has a high degree of internal phenomenological consistency because the DSQ's statements with respect to absorption can be understood on this interpretation, which is in contradistinction to Dreyfus's model. In terms of external phenomenological consistency, Høffding's research thus puts pressure on Dreyfus' model of coping and the folk-psychological notion that one shouldn't think too much while performing. On the other hand, it preserves the phenomenological key idea from Husserl, Sartre, Henry and Zahavi that all awareness has an element of self-awareness and is in line with suggestions from Legrand and Ravn (2009), Montero (2010; [forthcoming](#)) and Sutton and Geeves (Sutton et al. 2011; Geeves et al. 2014).

5.4 Summing up: phenomenological interview and EI

We share with EI the idea that one can develop an interview methodology that gives access to the pre-reflective structures of consciousness. We also share many of the specific pragmatic techniques of the interview. The main difference concerns the possibility of re-enacting an experience. Due to our phenomenological commitments, we do not consider this a viable solution, and this difference leads to changes in the aim of the interview and its subsequent interpretation. Instead, we highlight the reciprocal nature of the encounter and the co-generation of descriptions. This again leads to a conception of validity that places increased weight on the interpretative nature of the second tier. Impressively, EI can induce an increased self-awareness such that epileptic patients can learn to anticipate their seizures (Petitmengin et al. 2007). Contrastively, the phenomenological interview can do no such thing. It does not have a therapeutic, psychological or existential aim as such, but is a research tool to enhance the scope of phenomenology as a factual variation.

6 Conclusion

To conclude, we think that this process, which is built over two methodologically distinct, but overlapping processes, can guarantee the phenomenological value of an interview. The interview is informed by four principle phenomenological commitments, namely:

- 1) To the thing itself: using the interview to acquire detailed first-person descriptions of an experience in question.
- 2) Invariant structures: Using the interview to grasp the invariant structures of experience.

- 3) Subjectivity cannot be reduced to objectivity: In the interview, the first-person perspective needs to be understood on its own terms.
- 4) Enaction, embodiment and embeddedness: Phenomenology construes subjectivity as embodied, enactive and embedded. The interview directly confronts us with these aspects of experience.

Tier one might seem simple but, in fact, the very interview relies on one's training and concentration as an interviewer, as well as years of prior phenomenological training. One must be empathetically present with the interviewee and at the same time consult one's phenomenological background knowledge to generate descriptions that are as detailed and clear as possible. Tier two is an extension of tier one in which one employs the skillset from phenomenological analysis such that the tiers are in epistemological continuity. One can easily spend years going back and forth between the two tiers before one is satisfied and can judge whether one's grasp of the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the interview is phenomenologically consistent.

We have set out the "what, why and how" of the phenomenological interview. We have yet to answer the "where" question. In other words, where is this interview applicable? As mentioned, it is certainly not relevant to engage in a demanding interview, if one wishes to conduct classical phenomenology. But, as soon as one ventures into fields informed by empirical analysis and especially those that target experiences that are not available to one's own first-person perspective, the phenomenological interview becomes relevant. The fact that the framework presented can encompass and shed light on two cases as different as the pathology of cerebral palsy and expert musicianship testifies to its versatility and wide potential applicability. Other fields that could also benefit from our methodological reflections include, as mentioned, those inquiring into expertise, athletics, meditation, various illnesses and pathological conditions, and the education of nurses, doctors, psychologists and architects. We also believe that research projects such as Gallagher's on astronauts (Reinerman-Jones et al. 2013; Gallagher et al. 2014) and Thompson's on dreamless sleep (2014) could benefit from our work.

On a final note, we suggest a serious interdisciplinary effort, and encourage colleagues potentially interested in this approach to phenomenology to work with trained interviewers from for example sociology, anthropology or ethnography. We hope that such collaboration will lead to further reflections on the combination of interviews and phenomenology.¹⁶

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